

Penn State Forest encompasses 3,366 acres, located at Jenkin's Neck in Burlington County. The area is used for boating, canoeing, fishing, hunting, hiking, picnicking, and cross-country skiing<sup>1</sup> Penn State Forest includes Bear Swamp Hill, standing 165 feet high and forming one of the unusual elevations on the coastal plain. Its northern portions adjoined "the Plains," a region of strangely stunted pitch pine and scrub oak. Lake Oswego, covering 90 acres, was developed with picnic and bathing facilities in 1942.<sup>2</sup>

The most well known feature of Penn State Forest is the Pine Plains. The Pine Plains consists of four peculiar areas in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, together totaling about 12,400



acres, possessing a distinctive flora characterized, mainly, by dramatically dwarfed forms of the canopy trees, primarily Pitch Pine and Blackjack Oak.<sup>3</sup> Early in the 20th Century, Witmer Stone described them as "*desolate stretches of white sand barrens ... for the most part devoid of trees higher than one's knees.*" The Pine Plains are dominated by dwarfed Pitch Pines and Blackjack

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/penn.html> as of 1 April 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Wright, "A Century of Forest Stewardship in New Jersey, 1905-2005," 22.

Oaks in the low canopy. Pine Barrens heather is frequent in the understory, and ground cover includes lichens, mosses, and the sub-shrubs Bearberry and Teaberry.

All of the tree species in the Pine Plains are also found throughout the Pine Barrens, so why do they take on a dwarf form in the Plains? Though the mechanisms are not entirely understood, most experts believe that a combination of factors are involved. The Pine Plains soils are particularly subject to drought and nutrient deficiencies. Moreover, the plateaus are elevated above their surroundings, making the plains subject to higher winds. Most importantly, for centuries these forests have been exposed to wildfires at least twice as frequently as other Pine Barrens forests. These extremely harsh conditions have created a forest with Pitch Pine trees that are stunted and have adopted certain genetic peculiarities.<sup>4</sup> The Lenni Lenape were in Penn State Forest, as evidenced by shell-heaps.<sup>5</sup>

European settlers in the area date back to the early 1800s, when a very small village called Penn Place existed in what is now Penn State Forest. It was on the Pappoose Branch of the Upper Oswego River (the east branch of the Wading River). It was a tiny village of only five structures in the mid-1860s, which decreased to two structures only twenty years later. It got its name from a descendant of the Penn family that supposedly resided there in the eighteenth century. However, it appears that the first Penn in the area, James Penn, was the son of a William Penn who was a sea captain. The Penn who settled at Penn Place arrived in the area by the beginning of the nineteenth century, taking his grown sons and their families. Penn and one of his sons, Thomas, apparently operated a sawmill in what is now Indian Mills, New Jersey. James Penn died in 1814. The Penn family may have resided in the area up until 1890.

Around that time Edwin Pue and his wife acquired the property. The Pues contracted with the State of New Jersey for the sale of 2,764 acres of land in what was known as the Penn Reserve on 26 October 1909 for \$14,500.00, or \$335,000.00 in 2009 dollars.<sup>6</sup> The Board of Forest Park Reservation Commissioners acquired 2,764 acres of woodland in Burlington County from the Pues on February 11, 1910. This would be the fifth acquisition made by New Jersey for its new park system. This tract of pine and cedar forest, situated at Penn Place “in one of the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pinelandsalliance.org/glossary/#p> as of 6 April 2010.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pinelandsalliance.org/ecology/habitats/pygmyplains/> as of 6 April 2010.

<sup>5</sup> *Annual Report of the State Geologist of New Jersey for the Year 1898* (Trenton, N.J.: MacCrellish & Quigly, 1899), 43.

wildest regions of southern New Jersey,” and at the head of canoe navigation on the east branch of the Wading River, was a favorite stop for canoeists familiar with South Jersey’s streams.

In the first report of the Forest Park Reservation Commission which includes Penn State Forest, the Commissioners stated:

This tract, in the heart of the wilderness six miles from Chatsworth, on the New Jersey Southern Railroad, affords another example of the effect of fire protection upon a pitch pine forest. One-half the area is young volunteer pine growth, now giving promise of developing into forest form, and one-quarter is mature pine forest, which is intended to utilize as soon as the ground shall have been thoroughly restocked. The rest is in less satisfactory condition. Only one small fire (in 1912) has burned on the property within the five years since its purchase. A small income is derived from sphagnum moss and wild cranberries.

The Warden at that time was Elmer Inman.<sup>7</sup> Modernization rapidly followed on the heels of state ownership. The first telephone lines crossed Penn Reserve in 1912, when the NJ Forest Commission erected a telephone line from Chatsworth to a private cranberry bog on the East Branch of the Wading River, contributing \$300 to the cost. The nine-mile long line crossed the Penn Reserve and brought into communication a section of the state with few residents, but many fires.<sup>8</sup>

Danger from forest fires caused the first fire tower to be built at Bear Swamp Hill, which was a tree platform constructed around 1900. This was replaced in 1915 with a wooden lookout that burnt down. In 1960, a modern tower was erected, which became the site of tragedy a decade later.<sup>9</sup>

The ancient nemesis of fire was not the only danger in Pine Barrens, however. On January 16, 1971, Major William F. Dimas, a fulltime pilot for United Airlines and a flight commander with the Air National Guard 141<sup>st</sup> Tactical Squadron, took off from McGuire Air Force Base in order to practice bombing patterns in his F-105 Thunderchief at the Warren Grove Gunnery Range, located next to Penn State Forest. The fighter piloted by Major Dimas could reach speeds of nearly 1400 mph. For an unknown reason, Major Dimas clipped some trees

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<sup>6</sup> Annual Report, Treasurer of the State of New Jersey, Report of the Joint Committee (Trenton, N.J.: State Gazette Publishing Co., 1910): 442. Dollar amount: “Measuring Worth,”

<http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/result.php> as of 27 April, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> *Reports of the Forest Park Reservation Commission of New Jersey*, (Trenton, NJ: State Gazette Publishing Co., 1910), 22, 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Eighth Annual Report of the Forest Park Reservation Commission* (Union Hill, N.J.: Dispatch Printing Co, 1913), 64.

about 100 feet from the Bear Swamp Hill Fire Tower. He lost control of the fighter and crashed through the fire tower only 20 feet above the ground, cutting it in two and destroying a nearby generator, as well as about 1000 trees in a swath of destruction almost 40 feet wide and a mile long. Tragically, Major Dimas, a father of three, died in this mishap.<sup>10</sup>

Little occurred at Penn State Forest until the Great Depression. On July 6, 1933, the train station in Tuckerton received some new visitors as the first enlistees of the first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) arrived. The CCC was created by a law Congress passed on March 31, 1933, which created a public jobs program similar to others in the New Deal such as the Works Progress Administration or the Tennessee Valley Authority. The idea of the Civilian Conservation Corps was to take unemployed young men, usually between the ages of 17 and 23, move them to U.S. Army-administered camps in wilderness areas, and pay them a dollar a day for labor. For this thirty dollars a month the men would aid foresters in state and national parks and forests across America. Of the thirty dollars a month the men were paid, twenty-five would be sent home to their families to help them survive the Great Depression. The CCC camp located at Penn State Forest was for African American enlistees only, as this was a time of legal segregation of the races.<sup>11</sup>

The federal government's civilian program of conservation was followed by the activity of the military, as the world situation deteriorated and World War II began in Europe in 1939. Penn State Forest was a central location of military maneuvers that occurred in Southern New Jersey as the U.S. Army increased its preparedness.

The South Jersey seacoast underwent a theoretical "invasion" in May, 1941, as military official at Fort Dix developed a plan with civilian authorities with actions to take if Southern New Jersey was invaded by a foreign power. A five-day military maneuver involving 16,000 men took place in Penn State Forest between the imaginary "Blue-land," comprising New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania east of the Susquehanna River, and "Red-land," made up of Maryland and Western Pennsylvania. The "Reds" were to invade the Atlantic Coast to control the Delaware Bay prior to a war declaration.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>"New Jersey Fire Outlooks," <http://www.firelookout.org/towers/nj/nj.htm> as of 27 April, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> "The Bear Swamp Hill Airplane Crash," <http://www.njpinebarrens.com/content/bear-swamp-hill-airplane-crash-50/> as of 27 April 2010.

<sup>11</sup> John E. Pearce, *Heart of the Pines* (Hammonton, N.J.: Batsto Citizens Committee, Inc., 2000), 758-760.

<sup>12</sup> AID PLEDGED 44TH BY CIVIL OFFICIALS, Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES, *New York Times* (1923-*Current file*); May 18, 1941; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2006) pg. 37.

At 7:30 a.m., 16,000 troops from Ft. Dix moved out, reaching bivouac areas 35 miles to the southeast by 10 a.m. All of the troops moved via foot for at least ten miles, and by vehicle for the rest. The troops included 57<sup>th</sup> Brigade combat team, including the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments, 165<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, detachments of the 157<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, Engineers, Medical, and Signal troops, under the command of Col. Charles E. McCarthy, who pitched pup tents at Green Bank. The 87<sup>th</sup> Brigade, under Brig. Gen. Ralph K. Robertson, consisting of the 71<sup>st</sup> and 174<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments, the 165<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, and other detachments, bivouacked at the northern end of Bass River State Forest near Munion Field.. Division headquarters were in Penn State Forest, under Maj. Gen. Clifford R. Powell, 44<sup>th</sup> Division commander of two brigades. Also in that location were the 69<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 119<sup>th</sup> Medical Regiment, 119<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster, and the 104<sup>th</sup> Engineers command posts.

Trucks and tents were hid under pines or camouflage materials, which turned out to be unnecessary as the dust created by 2,000 trucks hung in the air all day and night. “In Penn State Forest, the dust was red from the brick-colored gravel roads built there by CCC workers, while in the Eighty-seventh Brigade area dust from white sand roads coated the troops and vehicles with gray. Unlike the others, the Fifty-seventh Brigade troops were choking from yellow dust originating from yellow gravel roads. The soldiers hiked two miles to bathe in the “rust-colored” streams, coming back as dirty as when they left due to the dust hanging in the air.”<sup>13</sup>

Although Penn State Forest and the rest of the Pine Barrens were safe from attack from foreign attack, a growing danger came from the domestic arena. In the late 1950s Burlington County officials began to push for a large airport to service only jets. Burlington County officials “were doing their best” to build a jet airport in the Pine Barrens, that would serve New York, Philadelphia, and most of the northern seaboard. “Plans for the airport have aroused little public reaction in this, the state’s largest county. Virtually all the reaction has been favorable, for the region in which the airport would be located is one of the most undeveloped and primitive in the New Jersey. It is far enough away from any sizable population center to prevent it from becoming a hazard or nuisance. . . The projected air facility would rise in the sandy scrub pine blanket that extends northward from Penn State Forest to Vincentown. It is bounded on the east

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<sup>13</sup> 16,000 MANOEUVRE TO CHECK 'INVASION' Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES. *New York Times* (1923-Current file); May 20, 1941; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2006) pg. 15.

by Lebanon State Forest and on the west by the mammoth 100,000-acre Wharton Tract, acquired by the state during the last five years as a state forest and potable water preserve.”<sup>14</sup>



**JETPORT SITE—X indicates proposed Burlington County airfield in the middle of unpopulated scrub pine country.**

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Lake Oswego was to be filled in and turned into an airplane runway as part of the supersonic jetport proposal. The proposed jetport was to be four times larger than Newark, LaGuardia, and JFK airports combined.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the area was started to be touted for its natural beauty, and people were encouraged to explore this wilderness that manage to exist between New York City and Philadelphia. In 1960, readers of the *New York Times* were encouraged to drive to Penn State Forest’s observation tower on Bear Swamp Hill for a “superb view of the South Jersey

wilderness.<sup>16</sup> The push to build a jetport in the Pine Barrens continued in to the next two decades, but it created an effective and growing opposition that resulted in the Pine Barrens being protected on the state and federal level. The public became aware of the unique environment of the Pine Barrens. For example, in the early 1970s educational “tours” were becoming available, like the 7½-hour canoe trip through the Pine Barrens that began at Lake Oswego in Penn State Forest, by then a 3,300 acre tract within the 1.3 million acres of the Pine Barrens. The guides Louis E. Hand and his wife, Eileen, gave five scheduled trips for free, and which were sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry.<sup>17</sup>

At the centennial of its inclusion in the New Jersey State Park system, Penn State Forest remains a unique enclave of Southern New Jersey wilderness.

<sup>14</sup> JERSEY COUNTY BIDS FOR JETS By GEORGE CABLE WRIGHT *New York Times* (1923-Current file); Jun 16, 1957; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2006) pg. XX7  
<sup>15</sup> Barbara Solem-Stull, *Ghost Towns and Other Quirky Places in the New Jersey Pine Barrens* (Medford, N.J.: Plexus Publishing, 2005), 120, 212.  
<sup>16</sup> JERSEY OFFERS INVITATION TO DRIVING By GEORGE CABLE WEIGHT *New York Times* (1923-Current file); Oct 16, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2006) pg. X29.  
<sup>17</sup> Pinelands Tour Unfolds Beauties Of Periled Area By ANIA SAVAGE Special to The New York Times *New York Times* (1923-Current file); Aug 13, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2006) pg. 67.